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RESEARCH STUDIES IN HIGHER EDUCATION: EDUCATING MULTICULTURAL COLLEGE STUDENTS- Ch 5

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Chapter Five

Engagement Practices and Study Abroad Participation of First-generation American College Students

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Undergraduate study abroad participation rates in the United States have steadily increased over the past ten years (Institute for International Education, 2009) and recent research shows that 55 percent of current high school students were absolutely certain or fairly certain that they would study abroad in college (American Council on Education, Art and Science Group, and College Board, 2008). In addition, there is overwhelming public support of international education with 90 percent of Americans believing it was important to prepare future generations for a global society and 77 percent valuing “educational experiences where time is spent abroad in other cultures” (NAFSA, 2006, p. 2). However, the high rate of student interest and public support is at odds with the reality of the actual undergraduate student participation rate of approximately 1 percent (Institute of International Education, 2009).

Although there is support for and interest in increasing participation, the current profile of students completing study abroad programs is heavily skewed toward a majority female, Caucasian student studying the humanities (Institute of International Education, 2009). Although the definition of an underrepresented student is inclusive of students from different academic disciplines, racial and ethnic backgrounds, and life experiences, first-generation (FG) students—as one such identified underrepresented group (NAFSA, 2002)—transcends all demographic categories that have been defined as underrepresented.

Demographically, FG students represent nearly a quarter of American college student enrollments (Chen and Carrol, 2005). However, higher education administrators have little practical guidance for how to increase FG study abroad participation on their own campuses. Scholars have also only recently begun to explore

this issue with few published empirical studies to form a foundation of research on the topic. Additional practical recommendations and empirical data are needed if efforts to achieve parity between FG college enrollments and FG study abroad participation rates are to be successful.

The relevant literature presents preliminary results on factors that may compel or dissuade students from participation in study abroad, but makes only cursory reference—if at all—to their parental education level. In light of this gap in the literature, this study attempted to evaluate if campus-based student engagement practices in a student's first year of study may serve as predictive indicators of study abroad participation during their undergraduate program at a four-year college or university in the United States. A multiple logistic regression analysis yielded cautiously generalizable results demonstrating that a FG student's exposure to diversity as well as living in campus-affiliated housing, participation in foreign language coursework, and private institution attendance all predicted study abroad participation.

The First-generation Student Context

First generation students are a significant segment of the higher education population in the United States, representing 22 percent of all students in four-year institutions between 1992 and 2000 (Chen and Carrol, 2005). As Table 5.1 demonstrates, this population is also disproportionately low-income; with more than half of FG students coming from families with gross incomes at or below \$25,000, and 84.6 percent of first-generation students coming from families whose income levels are at or under \$49,000. In addition to facing financial situations that may make college attendance difficult, this student population is also disproportionately underprepared for college when they arrive and generally lack the family and social support that their peers experience, complicating their navigation of their new collegiate environment. These students also may lack an understanding of higher education institutions as complex bureaucracies (Wilt, 2006), and additionally may not understand the expectations of student-initiated assistance (Deil-Amen and Rosenbaum, 2003). In sum, FG students face many challenges on-campus that other populations may not. These experiences can be particularly detrimental if students do not anticipate experiencing a challenging transition to college (London, 1992), knowledge that they may lack either because they have not acquired information about college through formal instruction or social interactions with those who have attended college.

**Table 5.1. Demographic Characteristics of
First-generation Students Between 1992 and 2000**

Demographic Characteristics	Total	First- generation students	Students whose parent(s) attended some college	Students whose parent(s) had bachelor's degree or higher
Gender				
Male	46.5	39.8	45.4	51.5
Female	53.5	60.2	54.6	48.5
Race/ethnicity				
American Indian	0.5	0.6	0.6	0.4
Asian/Pacific Isl.	5.1	4.7	3.9	6.5
Black	10.5	13.7	13.6	5.3
White	75.5	64.0	73.6	84.0
Hispanic	8.4	16.9	8.3	3.8
Family income in 1991				
Less than \$25,000	24.1	50.3	25.9	7.4
\$25,000-49,000	35.0	34.3	44.7	24.8
\$50,000-74,999	24.4	12.7	23.1	32.3
\$75,000 or more	16.5	2.7	6.3	35.5

(Chen and Carrol, 2005)

London (1992) claims first-generation students are “on the margin of two cultures” (p.6) because they may not readily fit into life on campus, and also may not have family members at home who have experienced college. This marginality may make a student’s interactions with faculty, administrators, and their peers more important than for other students whose parents have experienced college attendance (London, 1992; Richardson and Skinner, 1992; Wilt, 2006).

The Study Abroad Context

While institutions of higher education are serving an increasingly diverse body of students, there has also been a greater commitment to ensuring that the students attending these colleges and universities have exposure to international study. High school students themselves expect to participate in study abroad while in college (American Council on Education, Art and Science Group, and College Board,

2008) and have been participating in greater numbers and in more diverse locations (Institute for International Education, 2007). At the same time, the United States government has placed greater emphasis on increasing study abroad participation (American Council on Education, 2008; Benjamin A. Gilman Scholarship Program, 2006; Commission on the Abraham Lincoln Study Abroad Fellowship Program, 2005; Durbin, 2006; Hughes, 2007; O'Meara, Mehlinger, and Newman, 2001; U.S. Department of Education, 2006), and there is overwhelming public support for study abroad (NAFSA, 2006). Unfortunately, while great student interest in study abroad exists, the profile of participating students does not match higher education enrollment demographics.

In their 2008 publication, NAFSA: Association of International Educators extolled study abroad as pivotal to "the ability of the United States to lead responsibly, collaborate abroad, and compete effectively in the global arena" (NAFSA, 2008, p. 1). This document also placed particular emphasis on the domestic benefit of study abroad determining that the national benefit can be broken into two categories, strengthening national security and preparing US leadership. Study abroad can play a role in preparing American linguists with skills in critical languages that are gravely needed given that over sixty-five federal agencies have more than 34,000 positions that require foreign language skills and must be filled annually (Commission on the Abraham Lincoln Study Abroad Fellowship Program, 2005), a need that has gained urgency in a post-9/11 America (American Council on Education, 2002). With this need in mind, a 2003 report from NAFSA calls for "a Sputnik moment" (NAFSA, 2003, p. 3) recognizing the need to allocate resources to develop a national effort focusing on international education. The report urges that "study abroad must become the norm, not the exception" (p. 3) in order to accomplish this goal. Study abroad has a direct impact on strengthening national security by developing critical language skills, and can assist in preparing American leaders for global engagement.

An intended byproduct of study abroad is the opportunity for international American citizen diplomacy. Citizen diplomacy involves "individual Americans as students, teachers, athletes, artists, business people, humanitarians, adventurers or tourists. . . (who are) motivated by a responsibility to engage with the rest of the world in a meaningful, mutually beneficial dialogue" (US Center for Citizen Diplomacy, 2008). Study abroad plays a role in national diplomatic efforts by "fostering mutual understanding between nations at the citizen-level" (Hughes, 2007, p. 1) because students are able to sustain dialogue at the individual level in a way that is not otherwise possible through traditional means. This is further emphasized by Karen Hughes (2007), former Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs who notes that "our education and exchange programs have proven to be our single-most important public diplomacy tool over the past fifty years" (p. 1). In this regard, the benefit of sending students abroad transcends the skills, values, and knowledge that the individual student gains (Johnson and Mulholland, 2006). This statement may not come as a surprise considering her role as a federal voice for public diplomacy issues; however both Presidents Clinton and

George W. Bush also have vocalized their support for study abroad as a mechanism for soft diplomacy (Williams, 2007). President Obama has also declared his support for educational exchange saying that we must “find new ways to connect young Americans to young people all around the world, by supporting opportunities to learn new languages, and serve and study, welcoming students from other countries to our shores” and saying that such initiatives are “a critical part of how America engages with the world” (Obama, 2009).

Though the initiatives above suggest awareness of the importance of study abroad at the federal level (Benjamin A. Gilman International Scholarship Program, 2006; Commission on the Abraham Lincoln Study Abroad Fellowship Program, 2005; Hughes, 2007; NAFSA, 2003; U.S. Department of Education, 2006; Williams, 2007), data also suggest strong national support for international study at the citizen-level (NAFSA, 2006). In a 2005 poll conducted by NAFSA: The Association of International Educators, 90 percent of Americans believed it was important to prepare future generations for a global society. In addition, 77 percent “value educational experiences where time is spent abroad in other cultures” (p. 2). This data suggests that although only 1 percent of American undergraduate students participate in study abroad (Institute of International Education, 2007), substantial public support exists for international study.

Students themselves have placed greater emphasis on study abroad and are consequently participating in incrementally greater numbers (Institute of International Education, 2009). A 2008 poll conducted by the American Council on Education indicated that 55 percent of high school students were absolutely certain or fairly certain that they would study abroad in college. Unfortunately, the high number of interested students represents a “frustrated ideal” (p. 1) for international educators because the high percentage of interest is at odds with the low participation rate of undergraduate students participating in study abroad. Although overall participation in study abroad has steadily increased over the past decade, the percentage of students who are interested in study abroad in high school still does not match the overall participation rates.

Even through the massification and diversification of higher education during the twentieth century, the majority participant demographics of study abroad programs have remained relatively unchanged (Norfles, 2003; Williams, 2007). Study abroad has been described as an opportunity for White, middle-class, females (Smiles, 2001). This profile represents the majority of students in American undergraduate international study (Institute of International Education, 2009).

Incremental progress has been made between the 2000-2001 and 2007-2008 academic years to increase underrepresented student participation in study abroad overall (Institute of International Education, 2009). However, there remain a disproportionate number of minority students studying abroad, and minority and FG students continue to be underrepresented. Table 5.2 illustrates the student participation rates from the 2009 OpenDoors report (Institute of International Education) and empirically demonstrates varying participation rates in American study abroad across racial and ethnic student populations.

Table 5.2. Percent of US Study Abroad Students

Race/ Ethnicity	2000/ 2001	2001/ 2002	2002/ 2003	2003/ 2004	2004/ 2005	2005/ 2006	2006/ 2007	2007/ 2008
Caucasian	84.3	82.9	83.2	83.7	83.0	83.0	81.9	81.8
Asian-Amer	5.4	5.8	6.0	6.1	6.3	6.3	6.7	6.6
Hispanic-Amer	5.4	5.4	5.1	5.0	5.6	5.4	6.0	5.9
African-Amer	3.5	3.5	3.4	3.4	3.5	3.5	3.8	4.0
Multiracial	0.9	2.0	1.8	1.3	1.2	1.2	1.2	1.2
Native-Amer	0.5	0.4	0.5	0.5	0.4	0.6	0.5	0.5

(Institute of International Education, 2009)

This skewed participation comes at a time when employers are increasingly seeking students who have participated in study abroad (Chichester and Akomolafe, 2003). As the American economy increasingly globalizes, employers have come to view the value of cross-cultural competence and the foreign language skills that may be gained through an experience such as study abroad (Adeola and Perry, 1997; Commission on the Abraham Lincoln Study Abroad Fellowship Program, 2005). Students recognize this need and 43 percent have noted that international experience and education will help advance their career or give them a competitive edge (NAFSA, 2006). Unfortunately, students who do not participate in study abroad may not have the opportunity to develop skills demanded by employers and that will allow them to successfully operate in the changing marketplace (Chichester and Akomolafe, 2003).

In addition to career clarification and preparation, there are academic and psycho-social benefits of studying abroad. Students who participated in study abroad were found to have increased functional knowledge, a greater academic understanding of cultural relativism, and an increased knowledge of world geography when compared to their peers who lacked study abroad experience (Sutton and Rubin, 2004). Other practical academic benefits of participation are the opportunity for foreign language acquisition or study of a field not available at a student's home campus (Burn, 1980) and the opportunity for experiential learning that may not be an option on-campus (Steinberg, 2007). Beyond scholastic benefits, various psycho-social benefits such as increased self image and self esteem (Juhasz and Walker, 1987), values clarification, and intercultural conflict and coping skills (Ryan and Twibell, 2000), greater openness to diversity (Ismail, Morgan, and Hayes, 2006), and foundational changes in personality (Harrison, 2006) have also been documented.

First-generation students have been identified as one population of students that are underrepresented in study abroad (NAFSA, 2002) and as a result do not benefit as their majority peers may from the educational, social, and psycho-social

outcomes of study abroad participation. For this reason, practitioners need better guidance about what actions that they can take at their own institutions that can affect an increase in participation rates within this student population.

Empirical Basis for Research

A limited number of empirical studies have begun to explore the role of different aspects of the campus environment on student participation in study abroad. This topic has been discussed specifically in terms of access and the process through which students gain entry to study abroad (Bakalis and Joiner, 2004; Booker, 2001; Hembroff and Rusz, 1993; King and Young, 1994; Washington, 1998; Williams, 2007). Research also has examined underrepresented students' differential perceptions of study abroad (Bowman, 1987; Cash 1993; Norfles, 2003; Shirley, 2006; Bolen, 2001). This literature provides a solid base from which to explore the complex issue of underrepresentation by examining access, knowledge acquisition and perceptions of the experience, but largely fails to provide data on how underrepresented students arrive at their decision to participate. The work of Booker (2001), Williams (2007), and Norfles (2003) are particularly relevant to this research as these studies explored the student choice process from both the institutional and the student perspective. Special attention is given to a 2003 study conducted by Norfles on TRIO center director's perceptions of barriers to their student's participation in study abroad as this work was identified as the only research available that included first-generation students and the role of institutional referents on their participation in study abroad programs.

Williams' (2007) dissertation explored the role of institutional initiatives in encouraging student participation in study abroad. By surveying large research universities nationally, Williams was able to attain composite data on programs aimed at preparing underrepresented students for international study. Foundational to this study is the assumption that a pressing need exists for research that informs institutional action to more successfully recruit underrepresented students for participation in study abroad. This research represents a step beyond merely identifying specific barriers that impact participation. Instead the aim is to incite informed action by providing a snapshot of current practices at institutions nationally. Most relevant to this study, Williams argues that there is a need for knowledge of the practices at the macro-level that aim to boost participation rates of US students. However, the recommendations put forth by Williams would be strengthened by additional empirical research examining the extent to which environmental factors play a role in the decision of underrepresented students to apply to study abroad. Such a study would then provide institutions with the knowledge of where to place scarce resources and maximize the efficacy of efforts that aim to increase student participation.

Booker's (2001) dissertation, *Differences between Applicants and Non-Applicants Relevant to the Decision to Study Abroad*, is the seminal study on the

student choice process in study abroad. Using consumer decision process modeling, Booker created a new theoretical framework for understanding how students arrive at the decision to study abroad. Using this model, Booker identified specific factors that contribute to a student's decision to participate consequently leading to the evaluation of over one hundred factors that weigh on a student's decision to apply or not apply to study abroad. He argues that with greater examination of factors that may contribute to involvement, institutions will be equipped with a greater ability to target students for participation. Booker's study examined study abroad participants as aggregates and did not take into consideration gender, socio-economic status, or race/ethnicity. To this end, Booker identifies a clear gap in study abroad research in stating that "the study could be expanded to explore why minority students apparently are less likely to be interested in study abroad than non-minority students are" (p. 152). This assertion both supports the need for such research and provides a framework to do so.

In an attempt to gain insight on the barriers to study abroad participation for typically underrepresented students, Norfles (2003) conducted a study surveying TRIO Program directors asking what they perceived to be the greatest barriers for participating students. The TRIO program is a series extracurricular events and activities that provide structure for disadvantaged youth with the aim of encouraging academic excellence. Institutions of higher education may opt to offer space for on-campus centers to support these programs. Norfles argues that such centers, and their staff, provide an opportunity for a researcher to gain greater understanding of underserved populations because the staff is in constant contact with this particular population.

In designing her study, Norfles (2003) chose to survey the center directors at universities across the United States to gauge their perception of barriers to TRIO student participation in study abroad. Funding was identified as a primary barrier for students. Norfles stated that "high costs and limited financial aid funding were barriers to TRIO college-level students" (p. 14), suggesting that funding is important for this population of students. In open ended survey results one director expressed that because students are unable to afford such experiences they do not typically have the opportunity to explore other factors that relate to their participation. Such a response suggests that data collection on subsequent barriers may prove difficult for this population given that the financial barrier, even if a misperception, may preclude exposure to additional factors for low-income first-generation students.

Although the financial barrier was found to be the primary obstacle for students, this study used open ended responses and additional survey items to gather additional information that related to student barriers to study abroad (Norfles, 2003). This allowed the author to describe the financial impact by further specifying it in terms of overall indebtedness, overall cost, and loss of income. In addition to the financial barrier the surveyed directors cited family constraints, as well as lack of information about the opportunity to participate in study abroad and as a specific barrier to these students.

Finally, Norfles (2003) found that one of the major barriers to participation for the students in her study were those individuals working with the students directly. The TRIO directors, according to Norfles, overwhelmingly held the belief that low-income students do not benefit from study abroad. Consequently, the directors indicated that pursuing such an opportunity is “not a priority concern” and “isn’t necessary for them to reach their educational goals” (p.17). Given that TRIO students specifically do not attend schools where a large number of students study abroad, a lack of support for international education among center directors could have an effect on overall student participation. As a result, Norfles argued that “some individuals that work with these students may also be considered a barrier to students’ ability to study abroad when they limit the information provided to TRIO students and staff” (p. 17) and that “how directors value a study abroad experience, in most cases, is directly related to the level of support and information that they provide their students” (23). Consequently, the author stressed the importance of support from professional staff for the purposes of boosting underrepresented student enrollment in study abroad.

As one of the few studies examining first-generation students directly, the work of Norfles (2003) is groundbreaking. The author was able to gain access to a group of individuals intimately involved in the educational experience of first-generation students, and was able to conclude that the individuals working with students were the key to engaging or disengaging underrepresented students in study abroad. This finding emphasizes the importance of institutional relationships in the student’s decision to study abroad and provides a basis for the exploration of the institutional environment that is the focus of this study.

Focus of this Study

Given that a major finding of the Norfles study was that the institutional referents themselves can play a role in determining underrepresented student participation in study abroad, a greater examination of the role of the dimensions of the institutional environment on study abroad participation is merited. The relevant literature on barriers and catalysts to study abroad describes a variety of factors that may influence a student’s decision. Although university administrators cannot control all of the variables discussed as impactful on participation, they do have control over some aspects of a student’s first-year experience. Four such specific areas were identified for this study which was intentionally limited to exploring the impact of four domains of the college environment on first-generation students: (a) student experiences with diversity, (b) institutional support, (c) the quality of students’ relationships with institutional referents (fellow students, faculty, and university administrators), and (d) involvement with faculty.

A number of college impact models have been developed to explain the role that the institution plays in effecting change on specific student outcomes. These models focus on the source of student transformation by examining specific

environmental factors. Outcomes, such as participation in study abroad programs, can then be used to determine how students have changed developmentally while they are in college. What generally defines these models is their attempt to understand how the institution plays a role in developing a specific student outcome (Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005); e.g., learning (Pascarella, 1985) or retention (Tinto and Cullen, 1973).

Identifying that no study to date has examined how facets of the institutional environment may impact FG student participation in study abroad through the lens of student engagement, two college impact models, Pascarella's General Model for Assessing Change (1985) and Astin's Inputs Environment Outputs model (1970a, 1970b, 1993) provided the primary conceptual frameworks for this study. Astin's model broadly claims that change occurs due to a variety of experiences students confront while in college; this change is effected by traits that they bring with them to college (inputs) and results in a specific outcome (outputs). Astin's work was extended by Pascarella's General Model for Assessing Change (1985), which further specified the *environment* portion of Astin's model. Two particular sections of the model, *interactions with institutional referents* and the *institutional environment* were explicitly examined through the design of this study. The *output* in Astin's model, or the *learning and cognitive development* outcome in Pascarella's model are taken in this study to be a student's participation in a study abroad program.

The Seven Principles of Good Practice in Undergraduate Education developed by Chickering and Gamson in 1987 also reinforce the use of the four domains of the college environment identified for this study. This document outlined specific areas that are important not only to ensuring learning but also have an impact on other areas of student engagement. The four domains of diversity, institutional support, quality of relationships, and faculty involvement were all included among the Seven Principles as well as in the National Survey of Student Engagement (2006) a tool used to assess the role of environmental variables on student outcomes. That the four areas addressed in this study are all mentioned in the Chickering and Gamson foundational document as well as the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) lends weight to the exploration of their influence on student participation in study abroad.

According to Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) college impact models are particularly important in that they emphasize "factors over which college faculty and administrators have some programmatic and policy control" (p. 530). As such, the four domains to be explored in this study are those that potentially could be manipulated by practitioners to affect the desired outcome of increased participation in study abroad by FG students. Each of these four variables and their role in shaping student outcomes are presented in succession through the relevant academic literature.

The Role of Institutional Support for Student Success in College

Institutional support includes aid or assistance provided to students to cope with social, academic, and family responsibilities. Generally speaking, this support is purported to assist with both the student transition to college (Tinto, 2008), as well as academic success (Gerardi, 2006; Lotkowski, Robbins, and Noeth, 2004) for students completing their undergraduate studies.

Institutional support may be particularly important for some subpopulations of undergraduate students. Research conducted on the national level has demonstrated that overall, low-income students are less academically prepared than their higher income peers (Chen and Carrol, 2005). Twice as many low-income students take remedial courses, earn fewer credits in the first year, have lower GPAs in the first year, and are less likely to earn four-year degrees when controlling for other background variables (Chen and Carrol). As FG students are also overwhelmingly low-income, this data suggests that academic preparation may be a factor impacting the first-generation student's experience in college and may necessitate different types of support than that provided to other groups of undergraduate students.

That low-income students are both disproportionately academically prepared for college and lower performing has an important impact on such a student's experience in college (Chen and Carrol, 2005). As a result of this inferior academic preparation these students may be required to take remedial coursework, stop out, or drop out (Chen and Carrol). Poor academic preparation for college-level work can also serve as an impediment for low-income student engagement while they are pursuing their tertiary education.

Poor academic preparation may require additional academic support for first-generation and low-income students while they are in college (Tinto, 2008). Tinto reinforces this point by arguing that "the success of academically underprepared students does not arise by chance" and that "without such support, the access to college we provide them does not provide meaningful opportunity for success" (p. 2). This argument places university administrators in the challenging position of providing the additional support for first-generation students while they are in college.

Beyond navigating the workings of a university, FG students may also have difficulty understanding their new academic expectations (Wilt, 2006). As such, counselors and mentors play a key role in the FG student's transition to the college environment. Wilt argues in his 2006 work that "given the complex life situations faced by low-income individuals, counseling can be a significant factor in their higher education success" (p. 2). Given the context of such complexity, Wilt argues that counseling can serve to compensate for a student's lack of experience with the college environment by assisting with their negotiation of the college bureaucracy.

The expectation of student autonomy in the academy may be problematic for students who do not have knowledge of how to function in such a bureaucracy.

Termed the “burden of student-initiated assistance” by Deil-Amen and Rosenbaum (2003, p. 586) students must be aware of the assistance available to them in order to seek it out. Once they are aware that help exists they must then take the initiative to do so. However, Deil-Amen and Rosenbaum argue that FG students “cannot easily get advice about how to succeed, what pitfalls to avoid, or how to plan their pathway through college” (p. 586). Problems associated with the expectation of student autonomy may be compounded if a student does not expect to experience a challenging transition to college (London, 1992).

The role of a college mentor also becomes increasingly important in light of the way that low-income students may view the transition to college. London (1992) argues that FG students can feel “on the margin of two cultures” (p. 6) because they may not readily identify with the majority population on campus and may not have a social support system that includes individuals who have experienced college attendance. This idea is further supported by the fact that middle-income first-generation students found the transition to college less difficult than their low-income counterparts (Richardson and Skinner, 1992). Because FG students may struggle with acclimating to a new culture on campus and may struggle with feelings of alienation institutional support is critical for these students in the first year and beyond.

Institutional support may be important for FG students because they may suffer from a lack of support from their family while they are in college (Billson and Terry, 1982; York-Anderson and Bowman, 1992). Family support for this population has been shown to impact their first year experience (Carter, 2006). In this study, Carter found that low-income students' functional, emotional, and attitudinal independence from their parents actually had a negative effect on their transition to college. This finding represents a reversal of the common assumption that it is beneficial for all students to gain independence from family. Given that first-generation students generally lack family support in college this finding may have a differential impact on this population.

The college environment is multifaceted and complex. For this reason the first-generation student's experience is actually a product of many different types of interactions with faculty, administrators and their peers. London (1992), Wilt (2006) and Richardson and Skinner (1992) argue that the classroom and the faculty, and the role of counseling and advising do impact a student's experience in college. Further, these types of interactions are more important for first-generation students as they may assist a student's transition to college (London, 1992; Richardson and Skinner, 1992) and the depth to which they are able to engage while in college (Tinto, 2008).

The Role of Quality of Institutional Relationships

Although it is important for first-generation students to have sufficient institutional support the *quality* of the relationship with peers, faculty, and administrators is also important to student success. The campus environment is really composed of a variety of overlapping experiences and relationships, for example relationships between students, faculty, and administrators may exist in-class and out-of-class, formally or informally. How students perceive these relationships has been shown to be impactful on decisions to attend, persist, and the level that they engage with their institutional environment (Tinto, 1993; Hazeur, 2007).

Overall a student's sense of belonging has been shown to be related to their decision to persist to graduation (Tinto, 1993). Student academic and social integration, partially the extent to which students engage with institutional referents, has been shown to impact retention positively (Astin and Oseguera, 2005; Pascarella and Terenzini, 1980; Tinto, 1982; 1999). Further it has been shown that a student's connection with their organization leads to greater integration. In short, the quality and depth of a student's relationships have a direct impact a student's decisions to continue enrollment.

Tinto (1988) found that both belonging and inclusion were important components of a successful transition to college. These findings have also been explored in specific underrepresented populations in higher education as Hurtado and Carter (1997) found that a sense of belonging is particularly important for Hispanic students attending college. As such the quality of student relationships with their peers can contribute to a sense of belonging which may impact the quality and success of their college transition.

As has been mentioned, college administrators may be important to first-generation students who may not understand how to navigate the institutional environment or their academic requirements while in college (Deil-Amen and Rosenbaum, 2003). However, if students have a negative perception of these administrators they may further distance themselves from these potentially critical resources. This issue described in the previous section may be resolved if students have a positive relationship or perception of administrators at their university.

Positive relationships with institutional referent groups such as peers, faculty, and administrators can be important because these relationships may impact how a student feels about the general fit of the culture within a university. It has been argued that "a student's sense of connection to a college or university community remains an essential element of engagement, retention, and success" in college (Hazeur, 2007, p.4). In sum, a student's perception of fit may have a concrete impact on a student's ability not only to be successfully retained and persist to graduation, but also may create hurdles that are obstacles to engagement while in college if it results in disengagement.

Low-income and FG students may have certain attitudinal characteristics that impact their college experience. Research by Lotkowsky, Robbins, and Noeth (2004) found that time management and study habits, academic self-confidence and academic goals were the three strongest factors impacting full-time student retention at four-year colleges. It can be postulated that for students who lack these preparatory skills, this may serve to further complicate student engagement and ultimately the success of a first-generation student while they are in college. FG students who are facing these hurdles may not seek out assistance if they perceive institutional referents to be hostile, unhelpful, or a barrier to their goals. Indeed, this thought is in line with group socialization theory suggesting that a student's peer group may impact their educational decisions including what is worthy of being learned (Austin, 2002). No research has evaluated the relationship between the quality of relationships with institutional referent groups on a student's decision to participate in study abroad.

The Role of Faculty Contact and Interaction

Faculty remains a critical referent group for first-generation students because they are at the center of the knowledge sharing that is a cornerstone of the collegiate experience. For many first-generation students who are also low-income the classroom may represent the only opportunity that they have to engage in learning and interact with faculty and their peers (Tinto, 2008). For this reason, Tinto argues that there is a "centrality of the classroom to student success" (p. 600) for this population of students.

University faculty also play a role in promoting positive engagement practices and learning for students (Umbach and Wawrzynski, 2005). Faculty and student contact has been shown by researchers to positively affect student learning (Astin, 1993; Ewell and Jones, 1996; Pascarella and Terenzini, 1991; Tinto, 1993). Additionally, increased faculty contact has also been shown to be the top indicator of student persistence in higher education (Braxton, Sullivan, and Johnson, 1997; Huratdo and Carter, 1997; Stage and Hossler, 2000).

Although much of the research on faculty contact and student learning relies on self-reported measures of student engagement, the work of Umbach and Wawrzynski (2005) focused on faculty attitude and behaviors that may increase student learning. Using data from the 2003 National Survey of Student Engagement student survey ($n=22,033$ first year students, 20,226 senior students) and faculty survey ($n=14,336$) the authors found that on "campuses where faculty report frequent course-related interactions both first-year and senior students were more challenged and engaged in active and collaborative learning activities" (p. 12). Student gains were also noted in the categories of social development, general education knowledge, and practical competencies. Although these in-class interactions showed a great effect on students, out-of-class contact with students

proved less impactful. These types of interactions positively impacted the category of active and collaborative learning, however once the authors accounted for institutional control variables the impact was reduced substantially. Umbach and Wawrzynski's study centralizes the role of faculty in overall student learning. In sum, they found that at institutions where faculty-student engagement was high students tended to feel more supported and were actively engaged in their own learning.

Faculty contact is one important aspect of overall student engagement. At present the relevant research has demonstrated that increased contact has a positive association with persistence to the second year of study (Braxton, Sullivan and Johnson, 1997; Hurtado and Carter, 1997; Stage and Hossler, 2000) and increased learning while in college (Astin, 1993; Ewell and Jones, 1996; Fries-Britt, 2000; Pascarella and Terenzini, 1991; Tinto, 1993). However, no study to date has examined if these interactions are impactful on student participation in study abroad as an educational outcome.

The Impact of Diversity Experiences in College

Diversity encompasses a variety of contexts—political, racial/ethnic, religious beliefs, and personal values—and in higher education can take the form of contact with students that are from different ethnic, racial, economic or social backgrounds (Pascarella, Edison, Nora, Hagedorn, and Braxton, 1996). Research has shown that students tend to build greater tolerance to difference during their time in college (Astin, 1993; Pascarella and Terenzini, 1991) and that values, beliefs, actions, and attitudes are impacted most by interactions with fellow classmates and faculty (Astin, 1993; Pascarella and Terenzini, 1991). The peer group plays a unique role in the way that students experience gains in openness to diversity as exposure to diversity experiences that specifically require interaction between students are positively related with a student's openness to diversity (Pascarella, Edison, Nora, Hagedorn, and Braxton, 1996; Whitt, Edison, Pascarella, Terenzini, and Nora, 2001). Research demonstrates that students experience both exposure to and benefit from an increased openness to diversity in college and that their peer group and university faculty play a role in encouraging openness.

Two studies have specifically evaluated what additional variables may impact student openness to diversity. One study by Pascarella, Edison, Nora, Hagedorn, and Braxton (1996) found that precollege openness to diversity and perception of a nondiscriminatory college environment were both important indicators of an openness to diversity at the end of students' first year of college. This study also identified several practices that limit student openness to diversity. These were identified as participation in intercollegiate athletics, inclusion in a social fraternity or sorority, and enrollment in mathematics coursework as they all had a negative impact on student openness to diversity (1996). In a subsequent study Whitt, Edison, Pascarella, Terenzini, and Nora in 2001 explored whether these patterns

persist into the second and third years of study. They found that largely precollege openness to diversity persisted throughout a student's undergraduate career. The findings of Pascarella, et al. and Whitt, et al. further the work of Astin (1993) and Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) by suggesting that students' backgrounds and perceptions of the environment also play a role in student openness to diversity.

In addition to the factors that encourage openness to diversity, research has also been conducted on what direct benefits students receive from experiencing diversity in college. In one study curricular enhancements that increased the content of multicultural diversity in coursework resulted in an increase in greater critical and active thinking among students (MacPhee, Kreutzer, and Fritz, 1994). Although the level of impact differed by racial and ethnic group, overall students with exposure to a diverse student body tended to have higher incidences of intellectual engagement and motivation (Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, and Gurin, 2002). Overall, students with high exposure to diversity in during their undergraduate careers tended to report higher levels of satisfaction with their college experience.

Study abroad is fundamentally an experience that exposes students to diversity. However no research has been conducted exploring if high or low exposure to diversity is correlated with a student's decision to participate in a study abroad program. By including this factor in the analysis of this study the author will be able to expand research on the impact of diversity experiences by examining if a predictive relationship exists between diversity experience and study abroad participation.

Conclusion

Exposure to diversity, the quality of institutional relationships, experiencing a supportive institutional environment, and engagement with faculty have shown to be beneficial for other educational outcomes such as retention, persistence, and engagement (Astin and Oseguera, 2005; Bean, 1981; Lotkowski et al., 2004; Pascarella and Terenzini, 1980; Tinto and Cullen, 1973; Tinto, 1999), cognitive development (Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, and Gurin, 2002; Kuh, 1995; MacPhee et al., 1994), social development (Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005) and remain important indicators of effective engagement practices for students in general (Chickering and Gamson, 1987). Further, some of these engagement practices have been shown to impact populations of students, including first-generation college students, disproportionately both positively and negatively. These differential impacts occur while students make the transition to college and persist to graduation.

Although research is robust on the impact of engagement on many educational outcomes what has yet to be explored is whether or not these educational practices are also impactful for one specific type of educational outcome: participation in study abroad. Equipped with this gap in research, this study sought to identify if four specific types of engagement practices may serve as impactful predictors of American FG undergraduate student study abroad participation.

Research Questions, Dataset, and Methodology

In order to gain a greater understanding of the phenomenon of underrepresentation and how student engagement with the institutional environment impacts study abroad participation, this study evaluated four specific variables relating to a student's experience in college. To explore this present gap in the literature five research questions were developed that relate directly to four main composite variables evaluated in the study:

1. What are the demographic characteristics of first generation college students who do and do not study abroad?
2. What is the relationship between a first generation student's experience with diversity and their participation in study abroad programs?
3. What is the relationship between a first generation student's perception of a supportive institutional environment and their participation in study abroad programs?
4. What is the relationship between a first generation student's perceived quality of institutional relationships and their participation in study abroad programs?
5. What is the relationship between a first generation student's involvement with faculty and participation in study abroad programs?

The data used for this study to answer the research questions were collected by the Center for Post-secondary Study (CPS) at Indiana University-Bloomington (IUB) through the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) College Survey Report (CSR). With the affirmation that "what students do during college counts more in terms of desired outcomes than who they are or even where they go to college" (Kuh, 2001, p. 1) the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) seeks to quantify how frequently students are involved in engagement behaviors on college campuses. The survey was founded with seed money from the Pew Charitable Trust in 1998, and is now self-supported through the use of direct-fees paid by institutional participants. The goal of this survey is to collect information about student engagement from colleges across the United States.

The survey instrument covers a variety of areas of engagement that are considered good practice in undergraduate education. Such areas include a student's background, their perception of the college environment, and an estimation of their own growth since they began college. As the NSSE is widely used in higher education to evaluate levels of student engagement on campuses, institutions may use this data to inform programmatic enhancements or changes that they believe will result in positive student learning outcomes.

The survey is distributed widely at universities in the United States. In 2003 (NSSE) the survey was used on 437 campuses and, in 2006, 557 campuses were surveyed (NSSE, 2006). The *College Student Report* survey is distributed to both freshman and seniors allowing for longitudinal comparisons of student engagement practices as well as snapshot analyses of students who are at different educational levels within an institution. The large size of the annual sample makes it unique in

its reach in the field of higher education. Although strictly speaking the sample is not nationally representative, its results are generalizable to institutions that meet a similar profile to participating institutions. Annually, the results bear a strong resemblance to the general profile of institutions in the United States (NSSE, 2006). To illustrate this point, a table comparing NSSE and IPEDS 2003 data, adapted from the NSSE 2003 annual report, can be found in Table 5.3. Overall the NSSE, though the CSR, is a tool that can be used to evaluate engagement in a variety of practices on college campuses at the institutional or national level.

Table 5.3. NSSE and IPEDS National Comparison 2003

Carnegie Classification	NSSE 2003	IPEDS 2003
Doctoral/Research Ext	10%	11%
Doctoral/Research Int	9%	8%
Master's I and II	45%	43%
Baccalaureate—LA	19%	16%
Baccalaureate—General	17%	22%
Sector		
Public four-year	42%	37%
Private four-year	58%	63%
Region		
Far West	8%	10%
Great Lakes	18%	15%
Mid East	19%	19%
New England	8%	9%
Plains	11%	11%
Rocky Mountains	2%	3%
Southeast	24%	26%
Southwest	9%	7%
Location		
Large city (>250,000)	20%	19%
Mid-size city (<250,000)	30%	29%
Urban fringe large city	17%	17%
Urban fringe mid-size city	7%	8%
Large town (>25,000)	3%	4%
Small town (~5,000)	17%	17%
Rural	4%	6%

(NSSE, 2003)

The NSSE annual report describes the profile of participating institutions as being similar to the national profile through data reported through the IPEDS. As seen in Table 5.4., a comparison of the student characteristics of NSSE respondents,

NSSE schools and IPEDS data on national enrollments at four-year institutions reveals a similar pattern.

Table 5.4. NSSE 2003 and National four-year Demographic Information

	NSSE Respondents	All NSSE Schools	National
Gender			
Men	34%	45%	45%
Women	66%	55%	55%
Race/Ethnicity			
African American/Black	8%	10%	11%
Amer. Indian/Alaska Native	2%	1%	1%
Asian/Pacific Islander	6%	5%	6%
Caucasian/White	79%	70%	68%
Hispanic	8%	8%	8%
Other	1%	3%	4%
Multiple	6%	—	—
International	5%	3%	3%
Enrollment Status			
Full-Time	89%	83%	82%
Part-Time	11%	17%	18%

(NSSE, 2003)

Institutions of higher education often use their own NSSE data to compare their CSR scores against peer institutions or progress with institutional forecasts or strategic plans. However, academic researchers may also request data directly from the CPR to conduct analyses using NSSE annual CSR data sets. The later process was used for this study to examine how certain facets of the institutional environment may influence first-generation students and their decision to study abroad. This study examined first-generation American undergraduate college students who responded to the 2003 and 2006 distribution of the CSR instrument. This sample is comprised of 443 FG students, 97 study abroad participants and 337 non-participants.

Secondary data gathered through the CSR for the NSSE was used in this study. Using a secondary data set allows the researcher to rely on the strengths of the collection methodology as well as sources of additional variables that can be used as control variables in modeling data. However, using secondary data requires caution and critical review of the approaches followed when the data is collected as such processes occur beyond the supervision of the researcher. One of the

strengths of relying on data collected through a frequently used instrument such as the CSR is that its repeated use can be used to establish the reliability of the data generated by the survey (Alreck and Settle, 2003). Having a series of data can assist with the decision that a survey instrument is reliable. However, instrument reliability can be equally beneficial or detrimental on the overall reliability of the study (Fraenkel and Wallen, 2009); poor instrument reliability has a negative effect, and good instrument reliability has a positive effect. In the case of the NSSE *College Student Report*, measures were taken to ensure instrument reliability and subsequent internal validity of the conclusions of the NSSE (Kuh, 2001) and the survey has been used extensively as the basis for empirical research on student engagement (Carini, Kuh, and Klein, 2006; Filkins and Doyle, 2002; Harper, Carini, Bridges, and Hayek, 2004; Laird and Kuh, 2005; Pike and Kuh, 2005; Pike, 2006; Umbach and Wawrzynski, 2005).

To answer the five research questions descriptive statistics and a binary multiple logistic regression analysis were employed. Composite variables were created using multiple survey items to create the four main variables of interest: (a) perception of institutional support, (b) quality of institutional relationships, (c) involvement with faculty, and (d) exposure to diversity. Factor scores were calculated for each composite variable using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). These scores were then used to develop the final best-fit predictive model for study abroad participation of FG students.

Design Issues

Secondary data were used for all analyses in this study. As a result this work rests on any design flaws inherent in the data used for the analysis including those that may arise from self-reported student data. Also, lack of comparison data, be it nationally representative demographic information or other empirical research on the topic, should be considered when generalizing results.

The validity of self-reported data is generally affected by an inability to provide accurate information (Wentland and Smith, 1993), the intentional withholding of information believed to be true (Aaker, Kumar, and Day, 1998), and the inflation of experience (Pike, 1995). First, an individual may not be able to provide information if they do not fully understand what is being asked of them. Second, if an individual is uncomfortable about the topic they may avoid a truthful response. And third, when individuals provide self-reported data there is generally an inclination to inflate their experience. However this effect has been shown to be relatively constant across sampled populations (Pike, 1995). Student response bias is a concern for any data collected through direct administration, given these specific concerns the NSSE CSR was designed intentionally with these challenges in mind.

A significant limitation of this study is the lack of disaggregated data on study abroad participation. Students may have responded affirmatively to the item

regarding study abroad participation indicating that they enrolled in some type of international study. However, not collected by the NSSE CSR, or consequently examined in this study, are the duration (short-term, semester, academic year), location (by region or country), or type (inclusion of: service learning component, internship or career preparation, foreign language instruction, direct enrollment at a foreign university, island program sponsored by their home institution). Additional analyses revealing this data are not possible without direct contact with the anonymous survey respondents and are a limitation of the survey construct. The consequence of this holistic definition of study abroad is that any results must be interpreted with the understanding that there are many different types of study abroad experiences that comprise the monolithic definition included in the survey instrument and that no researchers would be able to evaluate the role of duration, location, or type of program using CSR data.

The FG students included in this study were identified as having parents who have not enrolled in higher education. However, it is important to note that the demographics of this sample portray a first-generation student that more closely reflects the demographics of the traditional undergraduate student. The FG students were majority female, have overwhelmingly attended private institutions, were between the ages of 20-23 during their senior year of college, and overwhelmingly lived on-campus during full-time enrollment status. Barring the special considerations of the FG student population mentioned above, the NSSE CPR closely resembles the general profile of American four-year institutions of higher education with relation to Carnegie classification, sector, size, geographic region, and location. Such demographics should be taken into consideration when interpreting any results.

With final regard to generalizability, a limitation of the findings of this study is that the data lacks a comparison pool. No national dataset collects information on first-generation student participation in study abroad, and only anecdotal literature and practitioner experience suggests that underrepresentation is a problem for this population. As a result the findings, even by frequency distribution of population characteristics, currently have little basis for comparison. This research is exploratory in nature as there is a general lack of rigorous empirical study on this population with regards to their enrollment in international education programs. That the field of study is nascent, particularly with regards to the first-generation student population, should encourage cautious generalization of the results by practitioners and scholars.

Results

Results were found for each of the five research questions developed for this study. First, results for research question one is presented. Second and finally, results for research question two through five are reported.

First-generation Participant And Non-participant Demographics

Question one related to the overall demographic composition of the first-generation students that did and did not participate in study abroad and took the NSSE CSR survey in their freshman year in 2003 and again in their senior year in 2006. The results show that these students are overwhelmingly traditional but differed in many ways. Overall, they were majority female (67.3 percent), Caucasian (77.9 percent), between the ages of 20-23 (91.6 percent), full time students (98.2 percent), in a fraternity or sorority (88.5 percent), academically successful in their freshman year (85.9 percent), live on-campus or in fraternity or sorority housing (80.6 percent), have participated in foreign language coursework (52.6 percent), attend private institutions (84.9 percent), and attend baccalaureate colleges (56.7 percent). Study abroad participants were more likely to attend a private institution, attend an institution with a Baccalaureate College—Arts and Sciences Carnegie Classification, are generally more racially or ethnically diverse, belong to a fraternity or sorority, be an athlete, live in on-campus housing, be more traditionally aged, and be a full-time student. The two sub-populations were found to be similar with regards to gender composition.

Results Associated with Main Engagement Variables

Stepwise binary multiple logistic regression analyses were used for questions 2 through 5 to determine if experience with diversity, perception of a supportive institutional environment, perceived quality of institutional relationships, and involvement with faculty had a predictive relationship with study abroad participation in the first-generation undergraduate population. As seen in Table 5.5, the results of the analysis showed a non-significant relationship between perception of a supportive institutional environment, perceived quality of institutional relationships, and involvement with faculty suggesting that a relationship does not exist between these variables and study abroad participation within this population. However, a statistically significant result ($p < .05$) was found for a student's exposure to diversity indicating a relationship between this variable and a FG student's participation in study abroad; a one-point increase in the composite diversity scale indicates that a FG student is 1.32 times more likely to participate in study abroad.

Final, Best-fit Model

Given the finding of a statistically significant relationship between one of the main variables of interest for the study, a best-fit model was developed that included demographic characteristics of the sample. The final, best-fit model included

student exposure to diversity, participation in foreign language coursework, living in campus-based housing, and attending a private institution.

Table 5.5. Final Logistic Regression Model

Final Logistic Regression Model Predicting Study Abroad Participation

Variable	B	SE	Odds ratio	Wald Statistic
Experience with diversity	0.28	0.124	1.32	5.067**
Foreign language coursework	0.32	0.16	1.38	4.235**
Campus-affiliated housing	1.39	0.45	4.01	9.657***
Private institution attendance	0.83	0.46	2.30	3.313*

* $p < .1$ ** $p < .05$. *** $p < .01$.

Major Findings

Three major findings were identified from the results of this study. First, that a student's exposure to diversity is a significant, predictive variable for undergraduate FG students who study abroad. Second, that there were three significant demographic variables that were included in the final best-fit model; (a) participating in foreign language coursework, (b) living in campus-affiliated housing, (c) and attending a private institution. Third, and finally, that gender and race or ethnicity did not have a statistically significant effect on study abroad participation in this population and in this study. As the central major findings of this study, each are discussed first through their suggestions for future research and second through suggestions for campus-based practitioners working with first-generation college students at American four-year institutions.

Major Finding 1: Significant Diversity Effect

The result of the binary multiple logistic regression analysis indicated that a FG student's exposure to diversity was predictive of study abroad participation. A one-point increase in the diversity scale would increase a FG student's odds of participation by 1.32, meaning that the student is 1.32 times more likely to

participate in study abroad than had that increase in exposure to diversity not taken place.

The composite variable used in this study to describe a student's exposure to diversity comprised three discrete items; (a) having serious conversations with students of different race or ethnicity than their own, (b) having similar conversations with those who have different religious beliefs, political opinions, or personal values; and (c) how often their institution encouraged contact among students from different economic, social, and racial or ethnic backgrounds. Suggestions for research and practice address these areas separately and together.

Suggestions for Research

Research has shown that a student's study abroad experience can impact their openness to diversity post-participation (Ismail, Morgan, and Hayes, 2006), however no previous research has determined if a relationship existed between general exposure to diversity and participation in study abroad for students in general or within the first-generation student population. This leaves open the possibility for additional research on the role that exposure to diversity plays in the study abroad decisions of college students in general, as well offers an opportunity to examine its role for the many underrepresented populations enrolled in American colleges. This relationship could also be explored in a confirmatory study that examines a similar population of FG students.

Although this study treated exposure to diversity as a composite experience, future research could narrow this focus, identifying if one component of meaningful diversity experiences as defined in this study increases the odds of participation for this population over and above the other composite variables. For instance, it may be that it is the institutional commitment to encouraging contact among these populations that plays a large role in defining student's perception of other types of experiences that incorporate exposure to diversity. Or, it may be that race or ethnicity or values-related exposure such as religious views, political opinions, or personal worldviews play independent and important roles in opening a student's eyes to study abroad. Finally, it could be the intersection of the three that is particularly important. Such questions were out of the bounds of the research in this study; however, the role of diversity experiences on study abroad completion is an open area for scholarly inquiry.

Suggestions for Practice

Many institutions have worked to create an environment on their campuses that is supportive of diversity in its many forms and have attempted to construct opportunities for meaningful exchange of ideas between different populations of students. With this in mind, the significant exposure to diversity finding suggests that these efforts should continue to try to increase meaningful exposure to diversity

among those of differing racial and ethnic backgrounds as well as religious, political, and personal beliefs. These interactions are not only beneficial to other areas of a student's collegiate experience, but also have now been shown to have a positive and predictive effect on their participation in international education. As a result, such interactions should be encouraged whenever possible among students.

It is important to note the language of the survey items relating to diversity experiences. The exchanges are defined as *serious* conversations, not cursory or fleeting, and that the scale relates to frequency of such interactions. This suggests that programming on-campus must go beyond the surface-level. There may be other opportunities intended to build collegiality among different groups of students, but this research indicates that what is important are meaningful, frequent interactions. This leaves practitioners to establish what the ideal opportunities may be for such interactions to take place on their campuses, but suggests that to be effective they must extend beyond the superficial, and must be frequent.

Generally, this finding necessitates that practitioners identify new ways to bring diversity into the campus experience of students. International, multicultural, or foreign language themed campus-based housing may be one way to achieve greater diversity of student participation in study abroad. However, it is important to note that not all students have access to on-campus social or educational events or services. First-generation students are more likely to be low-income (Chen and Carrol, 2005), and many may have responsibilities to family or employment that may take them away from campus, even if they live in on-campus housing. As Tinto notes the classroom is central to the student experience because it is the only place where all students may come together. If this is the case, curricular integration of diversity concepts could be particularly important for those students who may not be able to engage in the traditionally designed, campus-based, undergraduate experience.

Increasing exposure to diversity can be acquired through partnerships with and support for other campus offices such as multicultural student services, faith organizations, and politically-affiliated student groups. However, this exposure must be frequent and meaningful in order to affect a change in study abroad participation.

Major Finding 2: Significant Demographic Variables

Having participated in foreign language coursework, attending a private institution, and living in campus-affiliated housing during a student's first year were all shown to be statistically significant predictors of international study for first-generation undergraduate students. As a result these variables were all included in the final best-fit regression model. Not all of these are malleable characteristics of a student's experience that could be easily manipulated by higher education administrators, however their predictive ability merits a discussion of implications for further research and practice.

Foreign Language Attendance

Attending a foreign language course was shown to be predictive of study abroad participation. Statistically significant at the .05 level, a first-generation student was 1.38 times more likely to participate in study abroad if they had enrolled in at least one foreign language course as a first year undergraduate.

Suggestions for Research

Identifying that there is a relationship between enrollment in foreign language coursework and study abroad is important in opening the door for additional research. The NSSE CPR survey only collects dichotomous data on participation in foreign language coursework and therefore limits the possibility for analysis. Future research using other sources of data could identify if this predictive relationship persists or changes based on level of study or duration of attendance in foreign language coursework; for example, such research could explore if the predictive ability increases for students who are taking advanced language courses in culture or literature versus introductory language learning. Another area that could be clarified is whether or not the predictive ability of foreign language coursework attendance changes by language or language grouping. It could be helpful for practitioners to know if those students studying non-traditional languages are more likely to study abroad than their counterpart that enroll in a more traditionally studied language, as well as if they are more likely to travel to a destination where they may use those language skills. Such research could be important not just for identifying an avenue to boost study abroad participation but also for diversifying destination of study.

Future research could also examine the frequency of enrollment in foreign language coursework to evaluate if the predictive ability changes if a student enrolls in more than one course. Such analysis would be out of the structural bounds of the NSSE CPR dataset, and would need to be conducted using data from one or more institutions where such information is collected and readily available.

Suggestions for Practice

Study abroad may be seen by students, faculty, and administrators as a way to acquire, use, or hone, foreign language skills (Booker, 2001). Therefore it makes sense intuitively that a student that has participated in foreign language coursework during their first year of college may be more interested in the opportunity to continue language study abroad. It may be also that the experience of studying a foreign language, even on campus, exposes them to international concepts or themes that open a student's mind to the opportunity of global study. That this experience has a relationship with study abroad participation should encourage

administrators and faculty to encourage FG students to enroll in such coursework during their first year.

Given the statistically significant relationship between study abroad and foreign language coursework, the first step for campus leaders should be to ensure that such courses are offered as well as available to FG students on their campuses. This would include advocating for funding to support foreign language course offerings on-campus. When these courses are offered, care should be taken to make sure that introductory courses are available as first-generation students often attend college less prepared than their peers (Chen and Carrol, 2005) and may not have taken the required prerequisite courses for more advanced foreign language study. Given that these students also may not be aware that such courses are available to them or where to go to seek out information about such coursework (Diel-Amen and Rosenbaum, 2003), senior administrators should make sure that academic advising staff are proactive with this population and that they reach out early to them present foreign language coursework as recommended in their first year of study. Given that low-income first generation students may have work or family commitments, offering coursework at varied times or in alternative formats may also increase access to these courses. Senior administrators may also want to consider requiring foreign language enrollment for all students due to its predictive relationship with participation in study abroad.

Although FG students may lack family support for college (London, 1992; Wilt, 2006), it is important for administrators to reach out to student's relatives when possible and practical to explain the benefit of enrolling in foreign language coursework as well as study abroad. Removing all barriers to access to foreign language coursework is an important step when encouraging enrollment, and bringing family into the conversation about why such classes may be beneficial could be a way to remove one important obstacle for FG students.

Living in Campus-affiliated Housing

Results from this study revealed that those first-generation students who lived in campus-affiliated housing were approximately 4.01 times more likely to participate in study abroad than those who were not, a finding that was significant at the .01 level. Campus-affiliated housing, defined as either a dormitory or sorority/fraternity building had the highest impact of all significant variables in the final regression model.

Suggestions for Research

This study has demonstrated the effect that living in campus-based housing while a freshman in college has on first-generation student enrollment in international education. However such a result does not explain what it is about this experience that would predict study abroad participation. It may be that those students who live

in campus affiliated housing are higher income students who may also have access to other opportunities or life experiences that would encourage study abroad participation, or that those students who do not live in dormitories have additional obligations to family or work that would keep them from departing campus for an international experience. Living in university-affiliated housing could be a luxury to some students and may not be understood by parents who have not experienced college attendance. Future research should delve into these issues more deeply.

Living in campus-affiliated housing puts students in close contact with peers, potentially boosting their integration with the campus environment (Astin, 1993; Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005). Research on this topic could empirically explore if this plays a role in their choice to participate in study abroad. Conversely, for those students who do not fit into the campus environment, living in a dormitory may make that division all the more real and provide the additional incentive to leave campus and seek another campus experience abroad where they may feel a better fit. Additional academic inquiry into whether or not institutional integration as well as student satisfaction with their college environment may reveal if these areas are also important for study abroad participation.

Suggestions for Practice

Simply, higher education administrators must encourage those that do not live in campus-affiliated housing to consider doing so if it is economically feasible. Senior administrators should set aside housing grants for first-generation or low-income students so that those who may struggle to afford to do so may be more likely. Such grants may also incentivize family members to support their child's decision to live in campus housing. Housing options for students should also be plentiful and generally attractive to students. Finally, just as with foreign language study, a policy change could be supported that would require all freshmen to live in campus-affiliated housing.

With all of the constituents described here, study abroad professionals, senior administrators, residence life staff, and parents, it is important to stress that for some students living in campus-affiliated housing during their first year of college may not be an acceptable or appropriate option. However, given the effect this variable has on FG student participation in study abroad all barriers to student access to campus-based housing should be removed.

Private Institution Attendance

One variable was included in the final best-fit model that a higher education administrator can not explicitly control, private institution attendance. A first-generation student that attended a private institution was 2.30 times more likely to participate in study abroad than their FG peer at a public college, significant at the .10 level. This finding is particularly challenging because the majority of FG

students attend public institutions of higher education (Chen and Carrol, 2005). For this reason, higher education scholars and administrators must address this disparity in research and practice.

Suggestions for Research and Practice

Given that this variable is so highly predictive of participation in study abroad necessitates further study. Such examination should identify why this relationship exists perhaps by looking at whether or not there are differences in institutional culture or support for international experiences, or differential student or administrator access to resources that may facilitate the recruitment and participation of this population of students in study abroad such as better informing FG students about study abroad opportunities through more effective marketing of study abroad, or that the institutions have additional staff to reach out to students and support them through the application process. However, all these possibilities are just conjectures without rigorous empirical research to establish whether or not a connection between the two is or is not present, and is statistically sound. Given that study abroad data is currently scarce nationally, institutional consortia or regional accrediting bodies may be possible avenues to approach and research these institutions.

That institutional type plays a role in predicting FG study abroad participation is supported by NSSE CPR demographics. This data indicates that the overwhelming majority of FG undergraduate students that study abroad attend private institutions. This finding is important for senior leaders at public institutions and should serve as a call to action to address rampant inequity in participation among first-generation students. That FG students only represent 6.2 percent of the FG study abroad participants is significant, considering that these students make up almost a quarter of higher education enrollments (Chen and Carrol, 2005). Senior leaders should use this finding to advocate for the appropriate methods to increase study abroad participation on their campuses. Other findings from this study suggest one way to accomplish this goal would be through increased efforts at encouraging meaningful and frequent dialogue between students of different political or religious beliefs and race or ethnicities, encouraging enrollment in foreign language coursework, and living in campus-affiliated housing.

Conclusion

Enrollment in foreign language coursework, living in campus-affiliated housing and private institution attendance were all shown in this study to have varying but predictive effects on FG student enrollment in study abroad. This section has discussed specific ways to employ these findings in the areas of research and practice.

Major Finding : Null Findings of Gender, and Race and Ethnicity

The results of the regression analysis on demographic variables indicated no statistically significant relationship between study abroad participation and student gender, or race or ethnicity. Gender and race or ethnicity were both treated as dichotomous variables with gender divided by male and female and race or ethnicity grouped by majority/minority populations, indicating Caucasian students as the majority and all other racial and ethnic groups categorized as minority. This null finding runs against anecdotal and empirical literature that describes gender and race or ethnicity as being important factors skewing study abroad participation rates (Dessoff, 2006; Shirley, 2006; Slind, 2004; Washington, 1998).

Suggestions for Research and Practice

That race/ethnicity and gender do not play a role in study abroad participation for first-generation students implies that further research must be done to understand why these populations may differ from all other students in higher education. Returning to the demographic characteristics of the sample, the percentage frequency of Caucasian students is smaller for those who study abroad than those who do not (78.9 percent, and 72.2 percent respectively). This suggests that overall there is greater racial or ethnic diversity of first-generation students who have chosen study abroad. Demographically, there was little difference in gender across first-generation student groups with approximately a 1 percent difference between participation and non-participation favoring male participants in the study abroad pool. In addition, the regression analysis did not indicate a statistically significant relationship between race or ethnicity and study abroad. The demographic data and null finding on gender, and race and ethnicity has important ramifications for research on this population and topic; although this finding describes the phenomenon it does not explore why first-generation males as well as racial and ethnic minorities may have an increased interest in study abroad participation.

Future research should identify if the null effect of gender on study abroad in the FG population holds across program type and perception of fit on-campus. First, King and Young's research (1994) which found that shorter programs are more attractive for male participants suggests that grouping all program types together may actually mask gender difference that occurs within program types. Second, although one non-significant variable examined in this study was a student's perception of a supportive institutional environment, this is different from a student's overall feeling of fit on-campus. It could be that some FG students feel so marginalized on their campuses that they seek to escape to another academic environment abroad. Such conjectures could not be answered by this study, but must be examined in subsequent research.

Although overall participation of FG students is low, necessitating their inclusion in the definition of underrepresented students by NAFSA: Association of International Educators (2002), this research suggests that the racial or ethnic profile of those that attend is more diverse than those who do not and represents relative parity with regards to gender. With this finding, practitioners should look to the FG student returnees from study abroad programs to serve as ambassadors for other students on campus, a practice that could be particularly important for racial and ethnic minority students.

Conclusion

FG students do not fit the national trend of decreased participation among males and minority students. Specifically the results of this study have shown a null-effect of their gender and race or ethnicity on their study abroad participation. This information necessitates additional research to understand why this phenomenon may be taking place and provides recommendations to those administrators working with this population on campuses across the United States.

Conclusions of the Major Findings

The results of this study demonstrate three major findings regarding FG student participation in study abroad; (a) that student exposure to diversity plays a role in their enrollment; (b) that select demographic variables including enrollment in foreign language coursework, living in campus-affiliated housing, and attendance at a private institution all meaningfully contribute to the final, best-fit regression model predicting participation; and finally, (c) that neither student race or ethnicity nor a FG student's gender have a statistically significant relationship with participation. This section has detailed suggestions for research and practice for higher education scholars, practitioners, and policy makers as they relate to the three major findings of the study.

Composite Suggestions for Future Research and Practice

To facilitate the use of the findings of this study, all suggestions for research and practice are presented comprehensively in this section. First, recommendations for research are detailed, second, suggestions for practice are provided. Additional areas of exploration in research and practice that relate thematically to the topic of first-generation student participation in study abroad, but not to the findings of the study, are included at the conclusion of each section.

Composite Suggestions for Future Research

This study was exploratory given that no previous studies of student engagement and study abroad participation in the population were identified. As a result of this dearth of research there are many areas that should be explored in future research.

1. The role of general exposure to diversity on college students, as well as other underrepresented populations in the US should be explored. Confirmatory study of the findings of this study on other FG students would bolster or refute the conclusions and make for stronger assertions regarding institutional practice or take the literature in a new direction.
2. Student exposure to diversity in its disaggregated form; institutional commitment to encouraging diverse conversations and experiences, meaningful discussions with students of another race/ethnicity; meaningful discussions with students of another socioeconomic status, and political viewpoint or religion, could reveal important information for those diversifying study abroad. This would identify if the diversity effect is a function of the combination of these experiences or if efforts should be focused in one area or another.
3. Establish if freshman enrollment in a foreign language continues to be predictive of study abroad participation for first generation students by looking at level or duration of study, language, or language grouping in other FG student groups. In addition, whether or not this plays a role in diversification of destination of study should be explored.
4. Assessment of what it is about living in campus-affiliated housing during the first year of college that impacts study abroad participation would further our understanding of FG students' participation in study abroad. This could be accomplished through a review of social integration generally to see if there is a relationship between the social integration that happens in dormitories or in sorority and fraternity houses and the decision to study abroad.
5. A study could be designed that examines student perception of fit or if student satisfaction of their campus environment encourages or discourages participation in study abroad.
6. That private institution attendees are so overrepresented in FG study abroad merits a thorough review of this phenomenon exploring what it may be about private institution attendance that makes this possible. Determining if it is what feeds into private institution attendance in terms of student background variables or what happens within private institutions would be an important area to begin such an evaluation.
7. Research should be conducted that uncovers if grouping all program types together alters the variables included in the final regression model and determines if a null effect of gender and race or ethnicity hold across program type and perception of fit on campus.

8. Finally, a qualitative study of FG students who feel marginalized on their campuses who did and did not participate in study abroad could reveal if disengagement with social integration plays a role in FG student participation.

The results of this quantitative study have shown a statistically significant, predictive relationship of student exposure to diversity, living in campus affiliated housing, participating in foreign language coursework, and private institution attendance on FG student participation in study abroad. Although this relationship has been empirically proven no explanation about why this relationship exists is possible; only inference using the support of previous research. For this reason additional quantitative or qualitative research that examines why there is a relationship between each of these significant variables would assist in understanding the phenomenon of underrepresentation of first-generation students. Specifically, qualitative research could assist in describing how the socialization of students, the role of peer influence, and level family support—all variables not considered in this study—contribute to an FG student's participation in study abroad.

Composite Suggestions for Practice

On American campuses there are many involved in the practical implementation of study abroad programs. Senior administrators, faculty, front-line staff, and students all play a role in either ensuring diversity in the pool of students that seek international education or maintaining stratified participation. Although it is challenging to speak to all populations, comprehensive suggestions for practice are discussed here along with suggestions that relate to the larger issue of underrepresentation in study abroad programs.

1. Institutions should continue to create an environment where meaningful and frequent interactions among different populations of students can flourish. Those institutions that have not intentionally encouraged such practice should begin to do so immediately. One way of encouraging a climate where such interactions can take place is to be transparent about the institution's intent to do so by highlighting in advertising campus events that offer the opportunity for these interactions.
2. When implementing programming or policy decisions aimed at encouraging contact between different student populations institutions should bear in mind that it is serious and frequent interactions, not cursory or fleeting, that encourage study abroad participation among FG students. A natural fit for such discussions is in the classroom. Structured, guided discussions and thematic inclusion of diversity in curricula could be one way to achieve this goal.
3. Practitioners should consistently seek out new ways to bring diversity into the campus experience of students. This could be through campus-based development of international, multicultural, or foreign language themed housing, but should not ignore that some FG students will not have access to

much of the social and academic programming offered on-campus. As a result, practitioners should partner with faculty to ensure that such dialogue can prosper within the walls of the classroom.

4. Senior administrators should make sure that foreign language coursework is open and available to first-year students. This may necessitate coursework being offered at non-traditional times to accommodate FG students and their additional life commitments.
5. Academic advisors should be made aware of this research and coached to discuss the option of foreign language coursework with FG students. Subsequently the benefit of foreign language coursework should be explained to FG student's family as well so that both students and family are informed about the opportunity.
6. Senior leaders should advocate for funding for foreign language offerings to ensure that such opportunities persist for consecutive years and may even consider requiring foreign language coursework for all students in their freshman year.
7. Higher education administrators should encourage all students to live in campus-affiliated housing during their first year of study if it is economically feasible. Senior leaders should also create housing grants to offer to those students who may not be able to afford campus housing. This funding may provide an additional incentive for nonsupportive family to permit students to live at college. Administrators may want to consider a policy change that would require that all students live in institution-sponsored housing during students' freshman year.
8. Finally, study abroad staff should continue to use FG study abroad returnees as ambassadors for the experience. Practically, this can involve hiring returned FG students to work in the study abroad office, by asking them to lead information sessions on study abroad opportunities, or by asking them to participate in mentor programs for FG students considering participation.

Changing the demographic characteristics of undergraduate study abroad cannot occur without intentionality on the part of higher education administrators. Just as Jane Knight (1994) suggests that successful internationalization cannot come without first developing intentional planning, successful diversification of study abroad cannot occur without diligent and thoughtful preparation. Institutions that do not currently have established efforts to diversify the student profile participating in study abroad should work to ensure that such efforts receive the support needed to succeed on their campuses and that such efforts are localized in their relevance to the type of students that enroll in their institution.

Discussion

As Knight claimed in 2004 "the international dimension of higher education is becoming increasingly important, complex, and confusing" (p. 5). Knight here was

referencing the expansion of international efforts at universities world-wide, but her point can be taken and applied at a more micro level with regards to campus-based international education initiatives in the United States. As study abroad becomes more complex in type, duration, topic, and, of course, in the demographics of participating students, and efforts are made to ensure representative diversity of those students that enroll and complete global study programs, it may also become more challenging for researchers studying this population and practitioners working with these students. This is all the more reason why greater attention must be paid to this topic in research and through the identification of best practices for administrators serving this population.

A key component to internationalization of a university are the students that participate in international study programs. However, ignoring who the students are that are participating falls short of equity goals that are set in other areas of institutional practice. Higher education is a nexus of social reproduction; if campus leaders continue to provide stratified opportunities for students, a cycle of inequity will continue that does not prepare students to function in a global workplace, and world that continues to globalize. It may be challenging to intentionally diversify any portion of higher education participation, particularly among a group of students that are seemingly invisible on campus. However, this is precisely why it is critical to do so.

Although first-generation students are often pooled together because they share one important characteristic—that their parents have not attended college—they are also a group of students who have many different backgrounds, experiences, and life stories. It is with this in mind that the results from this study should be taken as only a step in the direction of a greater understanding of these students; the results cannot and should not be blindly applied to all first-generation students in all areas of higher education.

That the population demographics may favor a first generation student with more traditional student characteristics, should not devalue the results of this study. Instead, this finding only focuses the applicability of the results. As previously stated, FG students are hard to typify, something that makes studying and serving this student population a challenge. However, this should remind those who research and/or administer educational programs for this population that they are indeed dynamic individuals united by one important characteristic. Future work will need to deconstruct the first-generation student population to examine if, and perhaps by consequence how, subsets of this highly diverse group may be similar or different with regard to their interactions with and engagement in the institutional environment as well as how these interactions may play a role in their decision to participate in study abroad.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to establish if a predictive relationship existed between four student engagement factors and participation in study abroad. Relevant empirical studies and literature of practice on study abroad participation and student engagement were explored through and supported by two models of college impact; Astin's Inputs Environment Outputs model (1970a, 1970b, and 1993) and Pascarella's General Model for Assessing Change (1985). Using secondary data from the 2003 and 2006 administration of the NSSE CSR a binary multiple logistic regression analysis was conducted to create the final best-fit model for first-generation student participation in study abroad.

Although no relationship was found for a student's perception of institutional support, quality of institutional relationships, or involvement with faculty and participation in study abroad, this research found that a student's exposure to diversity was impactful on their decision to seek and complete international study. In addition to the core composite variables examined in this study, three specific background or demographic variables were also found to have a predictive relationship with a student's decision to study abroad. Living in campus-affiliated housing, enrolling in foreign language coursework, and attending a private institution were all found to be statistically significant, predictive, and practically important variables for this population of students.

Through three major findings this study has provided specific suggestions for research and practice. It is perhaps through these findings, cautiously generalizable across four-year American undergraduate institutions, that institutions may begin to address the issue of low participation rates of first-generation undergraduate students in study abroad programs.

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